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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 001072

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/MAG, NEA/PI  
USAID/W FOR ANE/MEA AND ANE/TS - SARA BORODIN  
PARIS FOR ZEYA  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH  
ROME FOR ROSE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2015

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [KMPI](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MO](#) [MOROCCO](#) [POLITICAL](#) [HIGHLIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCO POLITICAL HIGHLIGHTS

REF: RABAT 918

Classified By: Pol/C Timothy Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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WESTERN SAHARA  
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11. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Returns: Emboffs were pleased to greet the freshly groomed and chastened Norwegian ambassador, Arne Aasheim, at Norway's National Day reception on May 17. Aasheim returned to Morocco on May 15 after being recalled to Oslo on May 4 to clarify public remarks on the Western Sahara that deviated from Norwegian policy (reftel). Ambassador Aasheim told Polcouns during a May 18 lunch with visiting ASD Rodman that the television journalists who interviewed him were "wolves in sheep's clothing" and had pitched the discussion with him as a focus on Norwegian fishing interests in the Western Sahara. Aasheim admitted, however, that he had been somewhat "naive and outspoken" in describing the Western Sahara as, for all intents and purposes, part of Morocco. He added that pro-Polisario support groups in Norway were limited in number but vocal and influential. "They were calling for my crucifixion," Aasheim said diving into his salad, clearly relishing being back at the helm.

12. (C) Spanish Ambassador Urges Continued High-Level US Engagement: Spanish Ambassador Luis Planas told Polcouns May 18 that, while he understood US reluctance to name a high-level American successor to either former UN Personal Envoy James Baker or former SRSG Alvaro de Soto, the US needed to remain fully engaged in the Western Sahara; while granting Spain's important role in searching for a solution, Planas said no other country but the US can lead the way out of the current dispute. Polcouns affirmed that the US was indeed fully engaged in the search for a solution but believed that it was up to the parties to demonstrate their commitment and ability to move forward before the US would support enlisting a high-level American envoy.

13. (SBU) Officials Gather in Laayoune to Express Moroccan-ness: Sahrawi parliamentarians, NGOs, and ex-Polisario met in Laayoune May 16 to proclaim the "Moroccan-ness" of the Western Sahara. Moroccan media report the gathering was convened partly to respond to recent remarks by pro-Polisario activist Ali Salem Tamek in which Tamek stated bluntly he was pro-Polisario and called on the international community to press the Moroccans to quit the Sahara. (Tamek's remarks were made on Moroccan soil and carried in several Moroccan papers). Tamek's family members in southern Morocco have subsequently denounced Tamek, and on May 19 hosted a meeting of Sahrawi leaders at the family residence in Assa to proclaim their allegiance to King Mohammed and applaud the climate of democracy and openness in the Kingdom of Morocco.

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MOROCCO AND ALGERIA IN BRASILIA: HUGS AND KISSES  
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14. (C) Commenting on his recent trip to Brasilia to attend the Arab-Latin American Summit, MFA Director of American Affairs Salahuddin Tazi told Polcouns May 18 that Morocco had done everything possible to moderate the Summit's final declaration. He said Algerian President Bouteflika had embarrassed himself "in Arab eyes" by his warm embrace of Venezuelan President Chavez. As for interactions between the Moroccan and Algerian delegations, Tazi said "we smothered them with hugs and kisses." Tazi said being warm toward the Algerians is an important investment, even as "we remain skeptical about their actions."

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UK CONCERNS ABOUT STABILITY IN MAURITANIA  
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15. (C) During a May 16 office call, British Embassy First Secretary Adrian Chapman told Polcouns that UK Ambassador

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Warren-Gash had made his last trip to Nouakchott (Warren-Gash is accredited to Mauritania) before departing post and had come away "more concerned than ever" about political stability in Mauritania. He said the Ambassador believed that attempted coups and bloodshed could not be ruled out in the near future.

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SPAIN DENIES TANK SALES TO MOROCCO  
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16. (C) Spanish Polcouns Jorge Cabezas told Polcouns May 17 that press reports of military sales to Morocco of M-60 tanks, reported in Spanish newspaper La Razon on May 1, were unfounded. He did note, however, that the GOS was in the process of selling Morocco two patrol boats to augment GOM capacity to monitor the Straits of Gibraltar.

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SEVEN TONS OF MOROCCAN-ORIGIN HASHISH SEIZED IN ALGECIRAS  
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17. (U) Spanish police seized seven tons of cannabis resin in the Spanish port of Algeciras on May 17, according to MAP. The drugs were found stashed in a shipment of clothing on a Tangier-registered truck. The shipment was reportedly destined for France.

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JORDANIAN PM VISITS MOROCCO  
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18. (SBU) On a May 15-17 state visit to Morocco, Jordanian PM Adnan Badrane co-pressed with Moroccan PM Jettou over the Third Session of the Moroccan-Jordanian High Joint Commission. The commission's work resulted in the signing of seventeen bilateral agreements in multiple fields, including tourism, culture, and education, but mostly in the area of economic cooperation. Jordanian Embassy Consul Mohammed Hmaid told Poloff May 20 that PM Badrane pressed Jettou to remove Morocco's visa requirement for Jordanian visitors (Note: Jordan does not have a visa requirement for Moroccans. End Note). Hmaid said Jettou referred Jordan's request to "higher authorities."

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POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENTS  
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19. (SBU) IRI Says Political Parties Thirsting for Internal Democracy: Visiting American IRI trainer Tom Poff told Polcouns after a week of IRI-funded workshops with political parties that the middle ranks of Morocco's political parties are frustrated with the leadership of their parties and thirsting for greater internal democracy. He said while party members are eager for more democracy they do not have clear ideas on how to democratize their parties other than through changing the senior leadership. He also said his party contacts made clear that press freedom in Morocco was greater than ever before and that buoyed their hopes for greater democracy in the future.

110. (SBU) UMP Fusion to Happen "Sooner Than You Think:" In a May 18 conversation with Poloff, Popular Movement (MP) party member and advisor to the minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Mohammed Ouzzine, denied rumors of a conflict between MP secretary general (and Minister of Agriculture) Mohand Laenser and National Popular Movement (MNP) leader Mahjoubi Aherdan. Ouzzine said the fusion of the two Berber-based parties and the Democratic Union (UD) party into the Popular Movement Union (UMP) would take place "sooner than you think." Ouzzine commented that as the UMP's clearest "rising star," Laenser is the "glue" that keeps the three parties together. He claimed that the octogenarian Aherdan, who is an accomplished artist, wants to leave politics and immerse himself in his painting. Aherdan's goal, indicated Ouzzine, is to redo the fusion that was undone by multiple party splits since he founded the MNP in 1959. Ouzzine noted that UD secretary general Bouazza Ikken is also committed to the fusion, but wants to ensure that it is done the "right way;" that is, through the "front door" and not the "window," Ouzzine explained.

11. (U) PPS Announces Party Congress: The former Communist Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) announced it will hold its seventh national party congress in March 2006. The party's director of external relations M'hammed Grine told Poloff May 12 that PPS secretary general Ismail Alaoui, who has led the party since 1997, will not step down until his successor is designated after next year's congress. Grine affirmed that the party, and the two other members of the Socialist Alliance caucus (Social and Democratic Party and Al Ahd), still intend to fuse into one before the 2007 elections.

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NEWSPAPERS SPAR OVER CONCLUSIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY EXPERT  
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12. (U) In a tit-for-tat exchange of editorials this week, Arabic-language dailies Attajdid (affiliated with the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD)) and Al Ahdath Al Maghribiya (independent) sparred over comments attributed to a visiting "senior American expert." (Comment: The dailies did not specify but were probably referring to Carnegie Endowment for International Peace democracy expert Thomas Carothers who visited Morocco May 5-12 to conduct research on political party development and international programs to strengthen parties in the Middle East. Poloff met with Carothers on May 6.) Attajdid claimed on May 18 that the "American expert" was "surprised" at the level of popularity of the Moroccan PJD compared to Islamist parties in Turkey and Indonesia. On May 19, Al Ahdath reprinted Attajdid's May 18 article and commented: "The American expert had a very positive impression of Moroccan political parties but especially of the PJD, which has benefited a lot from American funding...so it will not be a surprise from now on to see the Moroccan fundamentalist party looking toward the west after funding from the east has run out." Attajdid denied in its May 20 edition ever receiving US money, and instead accused "certain leftist parties in Morocco" of benefiting from USG funding in the past.  
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